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SUBJECT: MFA HUMAN TRAFFICKING CONFERENCE

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Summary and Introduction

1.(U) Just before the EU's October 18 "Day Against Trafficking," the MFA held a public conference on October 16 highlighting GOA measures against trafficking. In particular, the MFA presented the National Action Plan adopted last March by the inter-ministerial Task Force on Trafficking. This Plan aims at developing further measures and more inter-ministerial cooperation in combating trafficking. FM Plassnik announced that the GOA would appoint a special government coordinator on trafficking in March 2008. End Summary.

Plassnik

2.(U) Foreign Minister Ursula Plassnik opened the conference, together with Interior Minister Guenter Platter, Justice Minister Maria Berger, and Women's Minister Doris Bures. Plassnik stressed that Austria was particularly affected by the problem of trafficking because of its geographic location in the center of Europe, at one of the major criminal crossroads from South Eastern Europe. She stressed the importance of international strategies in this context, and reported that, at a meeting of EU Foreign Ministers earlier in October, she had suggested joint meetings of EU Foreign and Interior Ministers to address the topic of trafficking. She also mentioned that Vienna will be the site of the "Vienna Forum" against trafficking in February 2008, which will be organized by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

Justice Minister Berger

3.(U) Expressing concern over the low conviction numbers for trafficking in Austria, Justice Minister Berger urged further measures to sensitize law enforcement and judicial personnel in order to improve identification of victims of trafficking. She suggested that clients of prostitutes be penalized if they should have known that the prostitutes were trafficking victims. She also noted that the Economics Ministry plans to standardize regulations in the various Austrian provinces and communities on prostitution in order to provide better protection of prostitutes. (Comment: Prostitution is legal in Austria. End Comment)

National Action Plan

4.(U) MFA official Johann Froehlich outlined the details of the National Action Plan against trafficking. The report includes measures in the areas of prevention, protection of and compensation for victims, law enforcement, international cooperation, and data collection and analysis. Preventive measures include sensitizing risk groups when they apply for visas, but also sensitizing the Austrian public as well as law enforcement and judicial personnel. The Task Force on trafficking has also set up sub-groups on child trafficking and on prostitution. Froehlich noted that, under the

Austrian EU Presidency in the first half of 2006, trafficking was the subject of the first trilateral US-EU-Russian cooperation project.

5.(U) Froehlich also reported on Austrian policies toward trafficking victims, such as a 30-day "stabilization period" for victims, during which they cannot be deported, and the possibility for TIP victims to receive a visa on humanitarian grounds. Froehlich noted that Austria spends roughly 3.4 million Euro annually on anti-trafficking measures, including prevention, victim protection and law enforcement.

NGO's

6.(U) Evelyn Probst from the Intervention Center for victims of trafficking applauded the government's efforts in the area of trafficking, but urged further measures to improve the situation of victims of trafficking, among them automatic residence permits for trafficking victims. She also noted that the intervention center should receive access to persons in deportation facilities, who are normally cared for by another NGO linked with the Interior Ministry.

Comment

7.(SBU) The conference was a high-level event aiming at drawing public attention to the subject of trafficking. It offered government representatives and NGO's the opportunity to present their programs and inform the Austrian public about the extent of the problem of trafficking.

McCaw